

THE formation of a peace front to resist aggression in Europe has caused an outcry in Germany against a so-called policy of 'encirclement'. This pamphlet contrasts similar protests made in pre-war years with those in the present situation, points out the reality of 'encirclement', describes how nearly all European countries are, in fact, 'encircled', and deals with such problems as *Lebensraum* in its political sense.

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DD 253
.B 667

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
AMEN HOUSE, E.C.4
London Edinburgh Glasgow New York
Toronto Melbourne Capetown Bombay
Calcutta Madras
HUMPHREY MILFORD
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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British interests or have become a danger to the Empire and thus have meant any kind of damage to England. I have always kept within the limit of such demands as are intimately connected with Germany's living space and thus the eternal property of the German nation. Since England to-day, both through the press and officially upholds the view that Germany should be opposed under all circumstances, and confirms this by the policy of encirclement known to us, the basis for the Naval Treaty [sc. the Treaty of 1935] has been removed.'

The Urgency of the Question

What makes it so urgent for us to understand these apprehensions which Germans profess to feel to-day is that there is a grave danger that this propaganda may succeed in leading the German people as a whole to believe that peace is endangered to-day by the hostile attitude of their neighbours, and not, as we know to be the case, by the aggressions and the bad faith of their own government. Such a conviction in German minds would be an immeasurable calamity. For even in these days of authoritarian governments, whenever the issue of peace or war is in the balance as it is to-day, the opinion of ordinary men and women about the merits of the cause for which they may be asked to face the horrors of a war is of vital importance; it is, in fact, far more important than it was in the past. It has become more important because a totalitarian war can

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proved beyond any doubt that Germans then were for the most part no less anxious to see peace preserved than we are ourselves; to many of us the evidence of this common desire for peace shared by both peoples seemed the one glimmer of hope left over from those tragic days. There is no reason to suppose that Germans are less anxious for peace to-day than they were last year, and yet we may take it as certain that if they come to believe that they are being ringed round by jealous hostile States bent on their destruction, they will steel themselves to face the sacrifices even of a war which they detest. We in this country may know with absolute certainty, we may even be puzzled to understand how any one can doubt, that, as the Prime Minister said in the House of Commons on 8 June last, 'any suggestion that we wish to isolate Germany, or to stand in the way of natural and legitimate extension of her trade, or to plan some combination against her with the idea of making war upon her, is fantastic.' But what we must realize is that *Einkreisung* and *Lebensraum* are slogans highly charged with emotional content, and that both make their appeal to the most primitive and unreasoning of all the emotions, that of fear. Both evoke the same terrifying picture of implacable enemies, pressing on their victim

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tinuation of, or a return to, a policy which she has pursued towards Germany once before with bitter results for Germany, it becomes easier to believe in its malevolence to-day. What, then, are the facts of our pre-War relations with Germany, so far as they touch this question?

It is believed that a speech delivered in the Reichstag by von Bülow, then German Chancellor, on 14 November 1906, contained the first public use of the word to describe the situation of Germany in relation to other Powers. That he ever really persuaded himself to believe that the charge of 'encirclement' had any truth in relation to British policy is very unlikely; at any rate, he had before him the repeated and emphatic assurances of successive German Ambassadors in London that it had not. We know, too, from documents which have now been published and whose purport should be known to Germans as well as to us, that Bülow quite deliberately decided to use the charge of 'encirclement' against us in order to overcome the resistance of the German people to the successive expansions of the German Navy which the Kaiser and von Tirpitz had determined to have carried out. In this he was brilliantly successful. Journalists, writers of books, politicians, university

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wholly untrue, and no one with even an elementary understanding of the British political system could have believed it. But in fact the whole story of a British *Einkreisungspolitik* before the War is a myth. That Britain deliberately worked for war with Germany because she was alarmed by Germany's growing commercial rivalry is a charge which almost disproves itself when made against a commercial people; a 'nation of shopkeepers' is not so silly as to imagine that even the most successful war can be good for its trade. Britain was driven ever closer to France and then to France's ally Russia in the pre-War years by one thing and one thing alone, by her fear of Germany's intentions; it was Germany's restlessness, her sabre-rattling at one international crisis after another, and above all her naval expansion (which seemed explicable only on the theory that the greatest military Power aspired to become also the greatest naval Power in the world), that welded the Triple Entente together. Even so, so deep-rooted was our detestation of the thought of war with Germany, that it was not until after war had actually begun that France and Russia knew for certain that we should be on their side.

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attention in this country. In so far as British people have been aware of it at all, they have been inclined, from a very genuine sympathy with German difficulties, to say that it was not unnatural for Germans to wish to salve their wounds and to restore their self-respect by minimizing their own share in causing the War and exaggerating that of their ex-enemies. We have believed that with the healing passage of time, the revival of German prosperity, and the recognition of any legitimate grievances that they might have, this mood of exaggeration would pass harmlessly away. We know now that in this hope we were mistaken. The 'war-guilt' propaganda has very effectively prepared the minds of the great mass of the German people to receive the new charges against us in which they are now being told to believe.

'Encirclement' since 15 March 1939

British 'encirclement' of Germany before the War was a myth deliberately invented. But the 'encirclement' with which we are charged to-day is not a myth in the same sense. Before the War facts were invented or distorted to support the charge; to-day there is no real difference between the Germans and ourselves as regards the *facts* to which the new charge relates, so long as these are considered simply

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whole purpose is to create a very real danger for Germany—in *certain events*, and if we tell Germans that the danger they foresee is imaginary we shall in fact be telling them the very opposite of what we want them to believe.

On the other hand, when Germans describe our policy towards them as 'encirclement', we have a right to point out that they are using a tendentious word. In that, of course, lies its propaganda value. They are using a word which, though it may be taken on the face of it to be merely a somewhat rhetorical description of a state of facts, suggests, and is intended to suggest, associated ideas of two kinds: it suggests that there is a conspiracy of Powers bent on manœuvring Germany into a specially dangerous position in which she does not attempt to place any of them, that she is being unfairly singled out for a peculiarly hard fate, and it suggests that the motive of this conspiracy is the jealous determination of others to thwart her legitimate development, and not the fear that she has aroused by her own provocative actions. Both these notions which the word 'encirclement' is intended to evoke are false, and in that sense it is still true to say that the 'encirclement' of Germany is a 'myth'. For the truth is that Germany's danger, so far from being of a kind to which she alone is

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in the centre of Europe, whereas Britain, France and Poland are not contiguous but divided, Britain and France to the west, and Poland to the east, of the Axis. Actually this central position of the Axis Powers, so far from being a weakness of which the other group is taking an unfair advantage, would, in the event of war, be a great source to them of military strength. In any case Germany, or Germany and Italy together, are far from being the only 'encircled' Powers. So long as the European States form, not a concert, but two rival groups, the facts of geography make it inevitable that situations should arise in which States may plausibly, sometimes far more plausibly than Germany in her present position, regard themselves as 'encircled'. Even a cursory glance at the political map of Europe to-day shows that Germany and Italy are themselves the great 'encirclers'. Since the seizures of Czechoslovakia and the Memelland Germany herself is encircling Poland: since the seizure of Albania, Germany and Italy together with Hungary and possibly Bulgaria, are encircling Yugoslavia; last September Germany joined with Poland and Hungary to encircle and actually to partition Czechoslovakia; and of the Great Powers to-day the one that has the best right to complain of 'encirclement' is not

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and *your* preparations therefore can have only an offensive purpose. If by any chance we have misunderstood your intentions, or if you decide to change them and behave like a good neighbour, you have nothing whatever to fear from our preparations, because in either of those cases none of the engagements into which we have entered will ever come into operation.'

What, then, is the evidence by which we might justify some such explanation of our attitude as this? The evidence on which our belief in Germany's future aggressive intentions rests comes from various sources, and its cumulative effect is overwhelming. But the position, put quite shortly, is simply this: that for some years now Germany has been setting the pace in a race of armament-building, that she has subordinated every other consideration of her economy to the creation of an army and an air force of unprecedented strength, and that when we ask whether, as she would have us believe, these preparations threaten no one, there are only two sources to which we can look for the answer: (1) the uses to which she has hitherto put her strength, and (2) the statements made on her behalf of the aims for which she needs this strength.

(1) Germany's own acts under the National-Socialist régime show that she claims the right

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'In respecting the demilitarized zone the German Government consider their action as a contribution to the appeasement of Europe, which contribution is of an unheard-of hardness for a sovereign state.' (Ibid., 1935, vol. I, 160, 171, 172.)

On 6 March 1936 Germany occupied the demilitarized zone without warning.

On 11 July 1936 the text was issued of an agreement between Germany and Austria, of which the first two articles were these:

(1) *'In the sense of the statement made by the Führer and Reich Chancellor on 21 May 1935, the German Government recognizes the full sovereignty of the Federal State of Austria.'*

(2) *'Each of the two governments shall regard the internal political conditions of the other country, including the question of Austrian National Socialism, as a domestic concern of that country, upon which it will exert neither direct nor indirect influence.'* (Ibid., 1936, p. 320.)

In a Reichstag speech of 30 January 1937 Herr Hitler thanked providence that he had been able to bring to a successful issue the struggle for the restoration of German honour and rights. He regretted that it had not been possible to carry through the necessary measures by way of negotiation, but, he added, *'As all this has now been accomplished, the so-called period of surprises has come to an end.'* (Ibid. 1937, p. 161.)

On 12 February 1938 the recognition of Austrian sovereignty contained in the agreement of 1936 was reaffirmed after the visit of Herr von Schuschnigg to Herr Hitler at

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beginning of this year (that is to say, before the assurances above-mentioned solemnly given to Austria and to Czechoslovakia).¹

On 15 March 1939 the Germans occupied what Munich had left of Czechoslovakia. It was not until after this event that Britain turned to the policy which Germans call 'encirclement'.

Lebensraum

(2) Herr Hitler in *Mein Kampf*² has explained with complete candour that he regards a vast territorial expansion as necessary for Germany's future, and that this expansion must be secured, if necessary, by the sword. His views on this matter are so important, both for understanding the policy he has hitherto pursued and for forecasting the policy he is likely to attempt in future, that it is necessary to examine them in some detail. It is significant that in only one respect, that of the worthlessness of colonies, has he since shown the slightest sign of having changed his views, and there we have seen an extension, and not an attenuation, of his programme.

The primary purpose of a foreign policy

¹ *The Times*, 10 October 1938.

² For a more detailed account of the doctrines of *Mein Kampf* see Oxford Pamphlet No. 3, in this series, by R. C. K. Ensor. The quotations which follow are taken from the German edition of 1933.

she needs it, because her present population is not properly distributed between town and country, and she needs it because her population is going to increase in the future. Herr Hitler assumes a present annual increase of population of about 900,000. German foreign policy should proceed on the basis that a century hence 'there will be 250 million Germans living on this Continent, not packed together as factory coolies of the rest of the world, but as peasants and workers who mutually guarantee one another the means of life through what they produce' (p. 767.)

For an examination of this estimate of the probable future German population the reader may be referred to Dr. Kuczynski's pamphlet '*Living Space*' and *Population Problems* in this series. The estimate is, in fact, so fantastically improbable that if *Lebensraum* were a merely rational construction, we might confidently expect that the conclusions of science would succeed in demonstrating the slenderness of the basis on which it rests. Unfortunately *Lebensraum* makes its appeal far more to the emotions than to the reason, and we must assume that it will survive the destruction of its demographical foundation.

In theory, Herr Hitler thinks there are four different means by which this dispropor-

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a correspondingly high duty to guard the purity of German blood (p. 732). The lesson of the past is that German policy should have a two-fold aim, 'ground and soil' for its aim in foreign policy, and a new and simplified foundation for domestic policy, corresponding to the German outlook on life. He pours contempt on any who would criticize this policy on ethical grounds. To prate of territorial expansion as a 'violation of the sacred rights of man' is to play the game of Germany's enemies, and serves only to destroy the will of Germans to promote their own vital interests by the only effective means they have, the power of the triumphant sword. Existing political frontiers, which are merely the product of the political struggles of the past, should be no deterrent to Germany; 'no people on this earth occupies a square yard of ground and soil under a higher Will or in virtue of a higher Right. . . . State frontiers are made by men and men may alter them.' When without it a great nation would be destined to go under, the right to an extension of territory becomes a duty; and that is particularly true 'when the question relates not to some wretched little negro people, but to the Germanic mother of all the life which has given cultural shape to the world of to-day' (p. 741.)

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the belief that the claim is first and foremost an economic one. At a time when Germany is so short of labour for her industry and her agriculture that she is importing thousands of foreign workmen from any country from which they can be drawn, she clearly cannot complain of over-population in the ordinary economic or demographic meaning of that term. In his great speech of 29 June last Lord Halifax declared, as British statesmen have many times declared before, that we are ready to co-operate 'in extending to all nations the opportunity of a larger economic life, with all that this means, which is implied in the term *Lebensraum*.' But the dynamic element in the *Lebensraum* claim is not economic, but political, and other passages in Lord Halifax's speech show that he at least is well aware of this. No doubt the economic difficulties of Germany serve to commend the claim to the sympathies of the ordinary German man or woman; it is convenient for a government to attribute the hardships of which Germans are conscious in their daily lives to the nefarious attempts of the outside world at the economic strangulation of Germany, especially when these hardships are largely the outcome of the policy that that government has deliberately chosen to follow. But we shall be making a dangerous miscalcu-

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the seizure of Albania by Italy, Herr Hitler described that country as 'living space undoubtedly allotted to Italy by nature and history'. Without this illuminating example the student of German mentality might have supposed that the German claim for *Lebensraum* envisaged an ordering of the world and a division of its territory in which *all* peoples would enjoy the highest attainable facilities for the good life, and that if 'nature and history' have allotted a certain *Lebensraum* to Germany, they may equally well be supposed to have allotted one to the Czechs and another to the Albanians. But evidently this is not so, and Herr Hitler has told us why. It is because the Germans are a superior race, and 'nature and history' ordain that their needs, or what they themselves decide to be their needs, must come first.

Might the Policy become Offensive?

One last criticism of British policy which has recently been made by a German writer to a British newspaper must here be mentioned. It is that the line between defensive and offensive preparations is not a clear one, and that a policy honestly intended at the outset to be defensive may easily be turned by the course of events into one of offence. That in the

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case, he went on to say, an issue affecting Polish national existence and independence would be raised, and 'we have guaranteed to give our assistance to Poland in the case of a clear threat to her independence, which she considers it vital to resist with her national forces, and we are firmly resolved to carry out this undertaking.'

Lord Halifax's speech of 29 June contained both an assurance and a warning. 'None of this formidable array of strength will be called into play,' he said, 'except in defence against aggression'; but 'in the event of further aggression we are resolved to use at once the whole of our strength in fulfilment of our pledges to resist it.' 'Defence' and 'aggression' are words which may be difficult to define in the abstract. But it is not easy to believe, either that the German Government is in any doubt that our policy will remain in fact, as it is in intention, one of 'defence against aggression', or that it does not know exactly what sort of action Lord Halifax had in mind when he used those words.